

Physical Reactions During Emergencies

During an emergency, people react differently than they do in everyday life:

- The automatic stress response is activated by our nervous system, telling the body to do things that increase our chances of physical survival.
- It starts with alarm, during which normal activities are stopped.
- Next, people become hyper-aware, looking around and quickly summing up the situation.
- People respond with a “fight, flight or freeze” reaction.
- Finally, there is a discharge of energy, after which the person returns to everyday ways of thinking and feeling.

During emergencies, people generally focus on survival and may not experience a lot of emotion. It might take some people quite a while to get back to normal.

Alexandria Community Services Board

- 24-hour emergency crisis intervention services
- 24-hour detoxification services
- Evaluation and assessment
- Individual, family and group counseling
- Day support and vocational services
- Residential services
- Inpatient services
- Prevention and early intervention services
- Service fees are based on ability to pay or without charge
- Multi-language availability

The Alexandria Community Services Board is a group of 16 citizen volunteers appointed by Alexandria's City Council. The CSB oversees the city's publicly funded services for mental health, mental retardation and substance abuse.

It is a CSB policy not to discriminate in the admission to its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, sex, handicap, religion or national or ethnic origins. Programs and activities are accessible to people with physically handicapping conditions. If you require accommodations please call (703) 838-4455 or TDD (703) 838-5054.



Psychological Preparedness for Stressful Events



Offering mental health, mental retardation and substance abuse services for the City of Alexandria



(703) 838-6400

24 hours a day

TDD: (703) 838-5054

www.ci.alexandria.va.us/mhmrsa/

What You Can Do

September 11, 2001 shocked us all. Many communities responded by increasing focus on their response to emergencies. It is important to focus on *psychological* preparedness: preparing the heart and mind for stressful events. How we think and feel influences our reactions to emergencies, our own survival, and the well being of those around us.

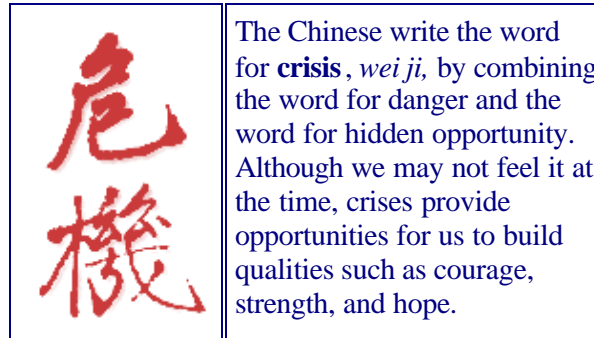
Emergencies require a special state of mind. Here are some things we can do to prepare:

Think Positively

After 9/11/01, we realize that emergencies can happen to anyone at any time and result in large changes in our lives. Change can be difficult, but is an important part of living. If we are able to face the stress positively and believe we can manage it, then we have a better chance of surviving and thriving.

Emergencies and crisis provide the opportunity for us to:

- Solve problems creatively
- Be flexible in new situations
- Rely on ourselves and others
- Work together with other people
- Believe that we, and others, can handle difficult situations



Know Yourself

How do you react during stressful situations?

“**Fighters**” tend to tackle a situation head on. They are good at dealing with problems directly. However, they can be overly aggressive and may act without taking enough time to think things through.

“**Flighters**” remove themselves from the stress. They are good at getting out of bad situations. However, they may avoid stress by running away and never resolve the problem.

“**Freezers**” tend to under-react. They are good at taking time to wait and see what to do next. However, they may be passive in situations where action is needed.

If we realize what our usual or preferred style of reacting is, then we can be familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of that style. We can then learn to use the responses that best meet the needs of the situation.

Prepare

A fireman can go into a burning building and a soldier can go into battle in part, because they have been *trained* to manage their responses to stress effectively. Training helps people realize what their instinctive response is in a stressful situation, and act in the most useful manner.

By making a plan and rehearsing it, you can train yourself to use your natural reactions to effectively cope with emergencies.



Build Resources

We can improve our ability to manage stress by building resources and resilience:

- Build a social support group and maintain effective communications within the group
- Improve problem solving skills
- Develop a variety of coping skills
- Improve health through nutrition, exercise and rest
- Deepen ethical, moral and spiritual understanding